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Wednesday, March 10, 2010

Smith Center achieves construction milestone

Facility will be first LEED-certified arts complex of its kind in country

BY TONY ILLIA

The valley's long awaited downtown cultural complex recently took a step closer to becoming a reality. The \$470 million Smith Center for the Performing Arts, a multi-theater and concert venue, celebrated a construction milestone on Feb. 25. Southern Nevada elected officials and powerbrokers turned out to see a crane hoist a 50-ton steel segment into place atop a 170-foot bell tower, which is the project's highest point.

"The dream of bringing a world-class stage to Las Vegas inches closer to reality every day," said Smith Center President and CEO Myron Martin. "It's both gratifying and exhilarating to watch construction workers make such significant progress on this magnificent facility."

The two-building complex, on 4.75 acres, is located at Grand Central Parkway and Bonneville Avenue, just east of the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health. Construction is about one-third complete. Project contractor, Whiting-Turner Contracting Co., broke ground in May 2009. The facility is anchored by a 2,050-seat proscenium theater with 23 box balconies and a 100-person orchestra pit, a 300-seat cabaret theater that overlooks the two-acre Symphony Park and a 200-seat studio theater for rehearsals and community events.

Smith Center is being designed by architect David M. Schwarz, whose high-profile project resume includes the Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall in Fort Worth, Nashville's Schermerhorn Symphony Center and Severance Hall in Cleveland. Other design team members include HKS Architects as executive architect, Fisher Dachs Associates as theater consultant and Akustiks as acoustical designer. There are 25 project architects,



COURTESY SMITH CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
Whiting-Turner Contracting Co. recently topped out the \$470 million, 170-foot-tall Smith Center for the Performing Arts, on 4.75 acres, at 361 Symphony Park Ave. In downtown Las Vegas. The project will take an estimated 1.5 million man-hours to complete by 2012.

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engineers and designers in total.

The steel-framed Art Deco-inspired building will be clad with 2,458 tons of Indiana limestone. It features a 16-story tower topped with a stainless steel silver crown, housing four custom-made carillon bells that weigh a combined 29,500 pounds. Its architectural style and detailing reflects the classic opera houses and theaters found in Western Europe. Yet, it also has modern touches. Smith Center will be the first theater in the country built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards as outlined by the U.S. Green Building Council.

"There are no performing arts theaters that are LEED-certified, so we don't have any reference materials," said Matt Edwards, a project manager with The Projects Group, which is serving as the owner's representative. "But LEED was always in our mindset from day one."

The project will use low volatile organic compound glues, carpets and paints, as well as energy-efficient windows, natural lighting and materials. Workers will recycle construction waste, thereby avoiding additional landfill refuse. Smith Center will also use high-efficiency mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. It's situated within the 61-acre master-planned Symphony Park -- a one-time brown field city-owned site that formerly served as a Union Pacific Railroad yard, which makes the project an adaptive reuse of an otherwise blighted property. All developments within Symphony Park must be LEED-certified as per city mandate.

Construction, meanwhile, will take 1.5 million man-hours over 32 months to complete. The building requires 4,000 tons of structural steel and 373 windows for its main theater. The Smith Center will serve as the future home to the Nevada Ballet Theatre and the Las Vegas Philharmonic upon completion in spring 2012.

Said Smith Center Chairman Don Snyder: "It will add a dimension that will give the people of our community what they need while adding a level of economic diversification to Las Vegas."

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